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The Woodward Tornado of April 9, 1947

Last updated: Thursday, January 17, 2002 17:11:00 LST
HTML Author: NWS Norman webmaster

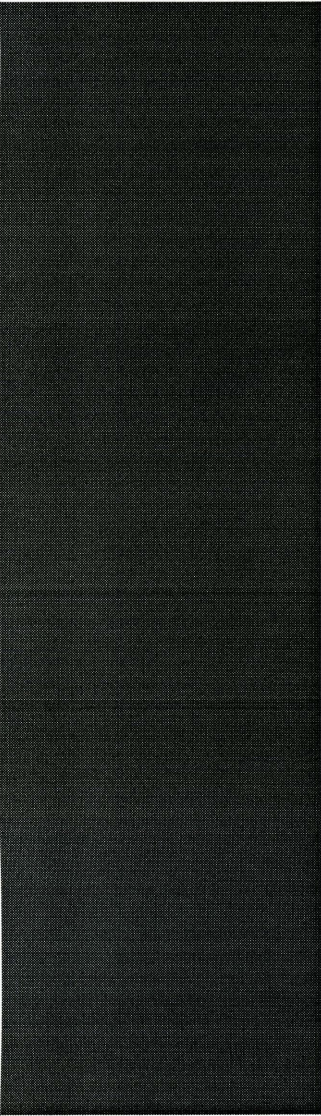


Photo courtesy City of Woodward

The worst tornado to ever strike within the borders of the state of Oklahoma occurred on Wednesday, April 9, 1947 in the city of Woodward. The Woodward tornadic storm began in the Texas Panhandle during the afternoon of April 9, 1947, and produced at least six tornadoes along a 220 mile path that stretched from White Deer, TX (northeast of Amarillo) to St. Leo, KS (west of Wichita).

The tornado that would strike Woodward began near Canadian, TX. Moving northeast, it continued on the ground continuously for about 100 miles, ending in Woods County, Oklahoma, west of Alva. The tornado was massive, up to 1.8 miles wide, and traveled at forward speeds of about 50 miles per hour. It first struck Glazier and Higgins in the Texas Panhandle, devastating both towns and producing at least 69 fatalities in Texas before crossing into Oklahoma. In Ellis County, Oklahoma, the tornado did not strike any towns, passing to the southeast of Shattuck, Gage, and Fargo. Even though no towns were struck, nearly 60 farms and ranches were destroyed and 8 people were killed with 42 more injured. Moving into Woodward County, one death was reported near Tangier.

The violent tornado (F5 on the Fujita Scale) unleashed its worst destruction on Woodward, striking the city without warning at 8:42 pm. Over 100 city blocks on the west and north sides of the city were destroyed with lesser damage in the southeast portion of the town. Confusion and fires reigned in the aftermath with over 1000 homes and businesses destroyed, at least 107 people killed in and around Woodward, and nearly 1000 additional injuries. Normal communications between Woodward and the outside world were not restored for some time and there was great uncertainty as to victim status.



In fact, the bodies of three children were never identified, and one child who survived the tornado was lost and never reunited with her family. Help for Woodward came from many places, including units from as far away as Oklahoma City and Wichita. Beyond Woodward, the tornado lost some intensity, but still destroyed 36 homes and injured 30 people in Woods County before ending.

In all, at least 116 lives were lost in Oklahoma on that fateful night 50 years ago. Never before or since has a tornado been so costly to human life in the Sooner State. Because of the Woodward tornado and other devastating tornadoes in the late 1940's and early 1950's, and because of new technologies available after World War II, the Weather Bureau (now the National Weather Service) began a tornado watch and warning program in 1953. During the last five decades, the warning system composed of the National Weather Service, local civil preparedness agencies, and the media has continued to mature and provide better and better information to citizens to help them protect themselves from tornadoes. Because of the strengths of the warning system, tornado death tolls in Oklahoma, and nationwide, have dropped considerably with each passing decade and, hopefully, will continue to decrease."

- Donald W. Burgess, National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL)

We have not seen a tornado of the intensity of the Woodward Tornado since 1947...but it could happen again.

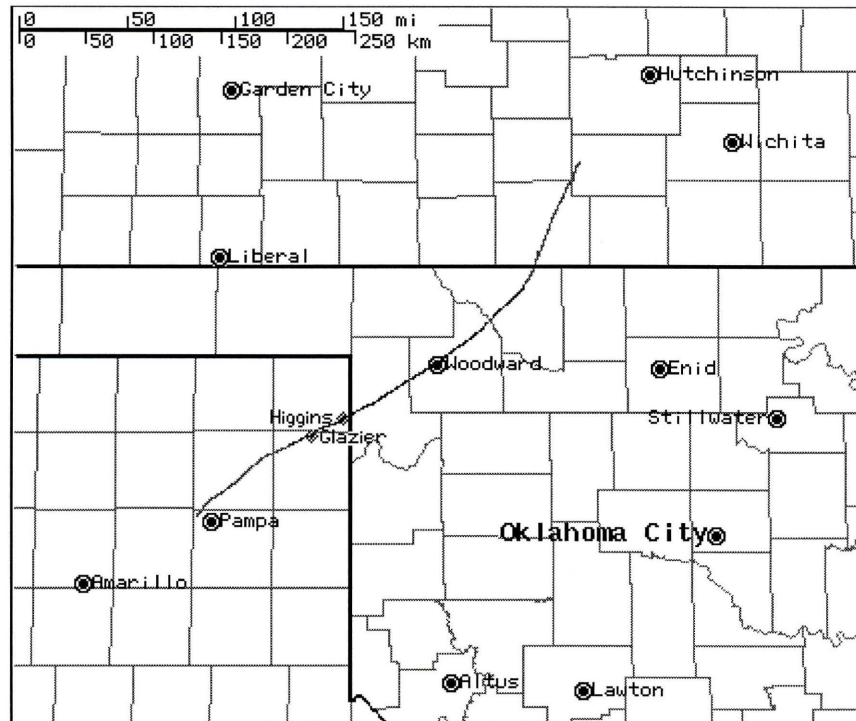
Now with Doppler radar coverage of Woodward from Norman, Dodge City, and an Air Force AFB NEXRAD located northwest of Enid in Alfalfa County...Woodward is better protected than it ever has been. Doppler radar technology has dramatically improved the warning process...and it is probable that a storm like the Woodward tornado of 1947 would be warned on well in advance by the National Weather Service.

Are you prepared? Do you have your own personal plan of safety? Do you know where you would go and what you would do if a tornado or severe storm would strike in your area??

For more information on tornado and severe weather safety, you may write us at:

*National Weather Service,
Attn: WCM 1200 Westheimer Drive
Suite 101
Norman, OK 73069-7900*

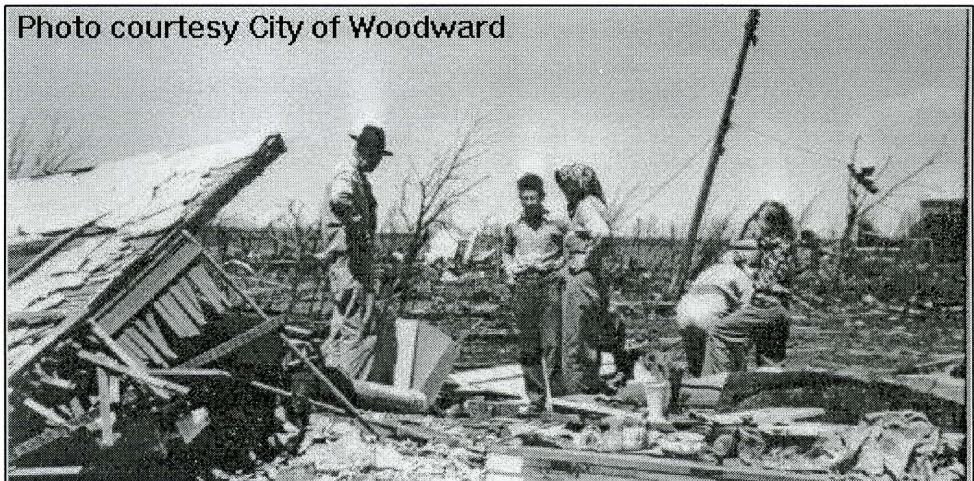
You may call us at 405-360-5928...Monday through Friday 9 AM - 5 PM.

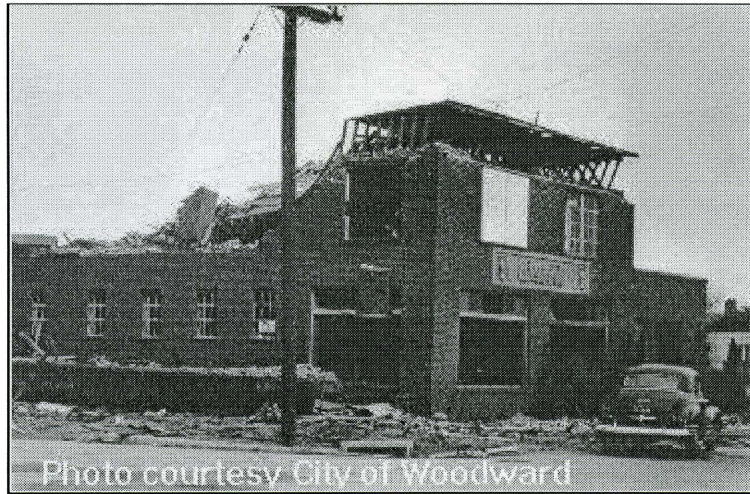
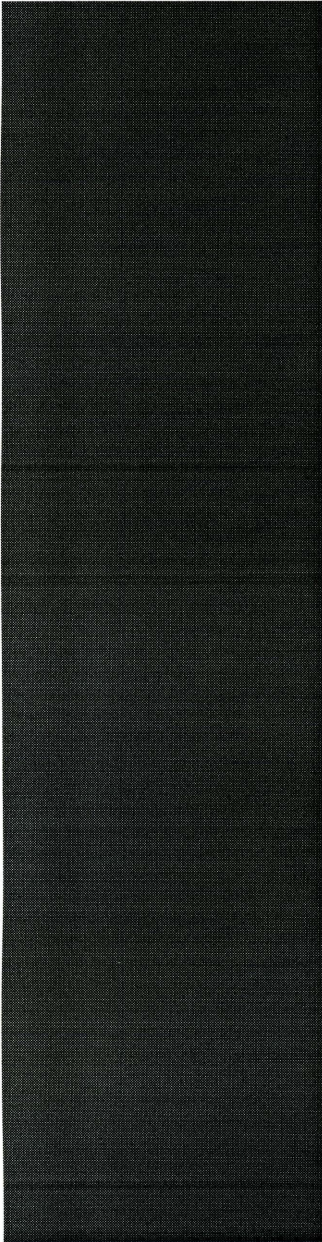


Map showing the Woodward tornado track. The blue area is what is now considered to be the track of the Woodward tornado. The red tracks were originally reported to be from the Woodward tornado also, but are now thought to be other tornadoes in a family of 5 or 6 tornadoes.

All photographs were presented to the National Weather Service in Norman by the city of Woodward.

Photo courtesy City of Woodward





049-147 Woodward, OK, tornado
(also photos from Glazier, TX and Higgins, TX)
9 April 1947

Damage investigation team: individuals from the then National Weather Bureau offices in
Amarillo, Kansas City and Fort Worth

There is no explanation of how we acquired these photos but as we have actual photographs I am
cataloging this storm in the archive (on 10/3/02).

Notes:

- The photos are mounted on cardstock paper and photo descriptions are typed under each photo
- Notes from The Tornado Project and NWS-Norman websites (Tornado Project categorizes this storm as the #6 U.S. Killer Tornado

Negatives: none

Prints: on cardboard, currently in file cabinet

Slides: none

Conservation Notes:

At some point the photos need to be properly removed from the backing. However, they currently appear in pretty good condition and the glue used does not seem to have caused any discoloration at this point. (Oct 2002).